



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Connecticut General Assembly – Veterans’ Affairs Committee
Testimony of Chief Operating Officer Charlene Russell-Tucker
March 5, 2013

Thank you Senator Leone, Representative Hennessy, Senator Welch, Representative Yaccarino, and members of the Veterans’ Affairs Committee for the opportunity to comment on SB 935, AAC Excused Absences from School for Children of Service Members.

We think it is important that this committee is aware of the work the State Department of Education is doing to address the issue of excused and unexcused absences in a variety of situations.

As required by statute, the State Board of Education adopted definitions of excused and unexcused absences at its June 27, 2012 meeting. Those definitions are attached to this testimony.

In addition, the Department is currently developing guidance for districts regarding implementation of the recently adopted definitions. Our guidance is consistent with the intent of this legislation. When a child visits his or her parent or guardian, and that parent or guardian is on active military duty, such visit qualifies as an “Excused Absence.”

Thank you.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Series: 2012-13
Circular Letter: C-1

TO: Superintendents of Schools
Principals of Schools

FROM: Stefan Pryor
Commissioner of Education

DATE: August 21, 2012

SUBJECT: Definitions for Excused and Unexcused Absences

During the 2011 Legislative Session, the Connecticut General Assembly enacted Section 10-198b of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.), which requires the Connecticut State Board of Education, by July 1, 2012, to define an "excused" and "unexcused" absence.

For the school year commencing July 1, 2012, these definitions are to be used by regional and local boards of education for the purpose of carrying out the provisions of Section 10-198a (C.G.S.) and for the purpose of reporting truancy. Section 10-198a (C.G.S.) outlines the interventions school districts must undertake when a student has unexcused absences, up to and including the designation of the student's family as one with service needs. The use of these definitions for state purposes does not preclude districts from using separate definitions of excused and unexcused absences for their internal uses (including decisions on promotion/retention, grading and disciplinary action).

On June 27, 2012, the State Board of Education adopted the definitions for excused and unexcused absences. The State Board of Education's resolution, along with the adopted definitions, is attached to this Circular Letter.

Importantly, you will see noted in the definitions "in accordance with State Department of Education guidance." The State Department of Education is currently working to develop this guidance. The guidance document will encompass best practices concerning:

- parental education regarding school attendance requirements;
- policies and practices to monitor attendance;
- monitoring systems that will assist schools in identifying at risk students; and
- evidence-based or research supported interventions.

The guidance document will be distributed to school districts as soon as it is finalized.

As the issue of attendance and truancy is of great importance, please take the necessary steps to ensure that appropriate staff within your district obtains this information.

For additional information or questions, please contact Raymond Martin at 860-713-6876 or Raymond.martin@ct.gov.

SP:jaw

cc: Charlene Russell-Tucker, Chief Operating Officer

IV.C.

CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION Hartford

TO BE PROPOSED:

June 27, 2012

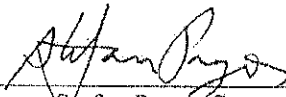
RESOLVED, That the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-198b of the 2012 Supplement to the Connecticut General Statutes, adopts the "Definitions of Excused and Unexcused Absences," as set forth in the Commissioner's June 27, 2012, memorandum to the State Board of Education, with the following correction:

Replace the sentence under the section titled "Disciplinary Absences," with the following sentence: "Absences that are the result of school or district disciplinary action are excluded from these definitions."

and directs the Commissioner to take necessary action.

Approved as amended by a vote of 8:1, this twenty-seventh day of June, Two Thousand Twelve.

Signed: _____


Stefan Pryor, Secretary
State Board of Education

Connecticut State Board of Education
Definitions of Excused and Unexcused Absences
Adopted June 27, 2012

The following definitions are for use by Connecticut school districts and schools for the purpose of carrying out the provisions of section 10-198a of the Connecticut General Statutes (Policies and procedures concerning truants), and for the purpose of reporting truancy, pursuant to subsection (c) of Section 10-220 of the Connecticut General Statutes. The use of these definitions for state purposes does not preclude districts from using separate definitions of excused and unexcused absences for their internal uses (including decisions on promotion/retention, grading and disciplinary action).

Excused Absences

A student's absence¹ from school shall be considered excused if written documentation² of the reason for the absence has been submitted within ten school days of the student's return to school or in accordance with Section 10-210 of the Connecticut General Statutes and meets the following criteria:

- A. For absences one through nine, a student's absences from school are considered excused when the student's parent/guardian approves such absence and submits appropriate documentation; and
- B. For the tenth absence and all absences thereafter, a student's absences from school are considered excused for the following reasons:
 - 1. student illness (Note: all student illness absences must be verified by an appropriately licensed medical professional to be deemed excused, regardless of the length of absence);
 - 2. student's observance of a religious holiday;
 - 3. death in the student's family or other emergency beyond the control of the student's family;
 - 4. mandated court appearances (additional documentation required);
 - 5. the lack of transportation that is normally provided by a district other than the one the student attends (no parental documentation is required for this reason); or
 - 6. extraordinary educational opportunities pre-approved by district administrators and in accordance with Connecticut State Department of Education guidance.

Unexcused Absences

A student's absence from school shall be considered unexcused unless they meet one of the following criteria:

- A. the absence meets the definition for an excused absence (including documentation requirements); or
- B. the absence meets the definition of a disciplinary absence.

Disciplinary Absences

Absences that are the result of school or district disciplinary action are excluded from these definitions.

¹ The Connecticut State Board of Education policy states that "A student is considered to be 'in attendance' if present at his/her assigned school, or an activity sponsored by the school (e.g., field trip), for at least half of the regular school day. A student who is serving an out-of-school suspension or expulsion should always be considered absent." A student not meeting the definition of 'in attendance' is considered absent.

² Such documentation should include a signed note from the student's parent/guardian, a signed note from a school official that spoke in person with the parent/guardian regarding the absence, or a note confirming the absence by the school nurse or by a licensed medical professional, as appropriate. Documentation should explain the nature of and the reason for the absence as well as the length of the absence. Separate documentation must be submitted for each incidence of absenteeism. For example, if a student is out sick two consecutive days, that student must submit the appropriate documentation covering both sick days. If a student is out sick two nonconsecutive days, that student must submit the appropriate documentation following each absence. Schools should take steps to allow non-English speaking parents/guardians to submit documentation in their native language.